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COMMENTS ON THE MINUTES OF THE NSCIC WORKING GROUP

1. Para 4. See also attachment 1, SIGINT Users' Handbook. Mr. Ellsworth's comments on the merits of a consumers' handbook were most interesting. NSA has published a SIGINT Users' Handbook and has distributed it widely among users of our product. The basic handbook serves as a primer to describe the SIGINT process and is supplemented by annexes which describe in more detail certain features of the system. For example, annexes have been published on the Community On-Line Intelligence System (COINS) and ELINT reporting as well as others. I am enclosing a copy of the Users' Handbook for your review and welcome any suggestions you might have on how we might improve its utility (attachment 1). You may wish to make suggestions on its distribution.

2. Paras 6, 8, 10 and 63. Throughout the minutes, I see expressions of concern about not having the means of judging the validity of one item of intelligence against another on the same subject, the need for more evaluation, and consumers receiving unqualified conclusions from the intelligence community. We have had, for years, a system for indicating the validity, ranging from certain to tentative, of an entire SIGINT product or of an element of information in a single product. We also evaluate and correlate, whenever possible, many seemingly unrelated SIGINT facts into a coherent product. The need for synthesized reporting was never more apparent than during the 1973 "Yom Kippur" War. We have since issued a daily summary of tactical military developments in the Middle East, and have more recently issued a daily summary of political and economic developments with military implications. As for evaluation and qualified conclusions, we provide our best conclusions drawn entirely from SIGINT facts and in the form of an epilogue to the report that we clearly label as a "comment". Hence, we avoid any concern that we are issuing "finished" intelligence.

3. Para 8. Regarding Mr. Ober's concern that consumers needed to know more about collection capabilities, I agree that they probably think the intelligence community can collect anything it wants and that the lack of reporting may convey the impression that nothing is happening. There are constraints on what we can collect, but the absence of reporting can be

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attributed to a host of other reasons. We may be encountering an esoteric language for which we have yet to develop a sufficient capability or the cryptosystem cannot be read. In any event, the requirements mechanism generally reflects the SIGINT capability to meet consumer needs: If we cannot collect the signals necessary to respond to a requirement, or lack the resources to process the signals when intercepted, it is our policy to advise the consumer that the SIGINT system does not have the capability to respond to his needs.

4. Paras 22, 23, 24-28, 30, 45-50. There are many paragraphs in the Minutes that show the concern of the Working Group about the estimative process. Mr. Ellsworth wondered if it was possible to have consumers help draft the terms of reference before an NIE is written. In that regard, terms of reference for an NIE are sometimes discussed at USIB. Any member may bring them up, and the NIOs will respond to USIB/DCI direction. Mr. Ellsworth also asked if key consumers could review the penultimate drafts of important NIEs. This may be indicative of an internal problem, and should not be addressed by the Working Group. Mr. Ellsworth would be better served by addressing his problem to DIA. Several members asked about a schedule of estimates and Admiral Hilton noted that there used to be a formal document. The old Board of National Estimates used to prepare six-months programs for NIEs and USIB reviewed them each quarter. This was required by DCID 1/1, which was never updated or rescinded by the new NSCID 1, and the requirement has been ignored by the NIOs. As for evaluating the accuracy of estimates, I agree with Admiral Hilton that the Working Group should not get involved at the outset; it should first see if the estimates attempt to answer the right questions. I believe a briefing on the estimative process would do the Working Group a lot of good.

5. Paras 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 20 and 21. Several paragraphs in the Minutes concern the lack of a mechanism by which consumers may provide a feedback to the community on its products. There is indeed no mechanism, as such, but the 11 October 1974 Letter of Instruction from the DCI to the Chairman of the SIGINT Committee directed the chairman....to rework our SIGINT requirement mechanism....to seek improvement in expressing the community's real needs....and to pursue the means whereby the value of the SIGINT product can be judged.

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In response, the Intelligence Guidance Subcommittee of the SIGINT committee has developed a model of a new USIB SIGINT requirements system (SIREs) which will include procedures for continuing review and updating of SIGINT requirements and evaluations of current consumer satisfaction of these requirements. This evaluation or feedback process would include requirements pertaining to the various KIQs. This mechanism would at least tell us the extent to which we are satisfying consumer needs.

6. Paras 16 and 34. Statements of consumer needs are the best possible statement of intelligence requirements and are actively solicited by NSA. Any translation of such a statement of need should identify for the program manager the tasking and reporting required to satisfy that need. His statement of needs is always "right". The consumer becomes an "irritant" when he attempts to judge the technical method of satisfaction.

7. Para 43. During the past year NSA has submitted for USIB consideration a number of reporting changes required by manpower decrements. USIB reporting requirements are not changed unilaterally by NSA.

8. Paras 31, 32, 33. I agree that current intelligence reports and estimates containing information from sensitive sources pose a problem of dissemination. I am, of course, required by Mr. Colby's regulations to protect the SIGINT origin of our reports. But we go as far as the regulations permit to sanitize some of our product before it is issued. Most plain language messages, for example, are issued in a special format in which the translation is sanitized and set apart from footnotes and comments that otherwise reveal the SIGINT source. Those authorized in the Community to act upon the sanitized information or disseminate it to persons without a SIGINT clearance are well served by the special format. But we are testing other versions of the format in joint field exercises at home and abroad to speed up the dissemination of COMINT to field commanders. As for the problem of sanitizing SIGINT, regardless of category, it is now under study in a committee of the United States Intelligence Board.

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9. Paras 36, 37, 53. While I have no reason to believe that the comments of the Secretary of Defense noting surprise that intelligence collectors were not aware of his interest in qualitative aspects of the Soviet force were aimed at SIGINT collectors, I feel that a few comments are warranted. I am confident that the SIGINT system is responsive to many of the needs expressed by the Secretary. Through the medium of the SIGINT Reporters Instructions, SIGINT producers are given explicit guidance on what and how to report. Some of his concerns, such as an assessment of the manufacturing efficiency of the USSR vs the U.S., are generally beyond our capabilities, but SIGINT makes a valuable contribution on those charged with making such assessments.

10. Para 54. I note Mr. Ober's comments that separate reports by CIA and DIA in crisis situations cause problems, and I agree that this may be so. On the other hand, I believe there is merit in the consumers' awareness of differing views in the assessment of an event. Consensus, I fear, often results in pap. This was recognized in the IC Staff's Post Mortem of the Yom Kippur War. While advocating the issuance of a single national intelligence publication during crisis periods, the Staff recommended the creation of a system which would "...ensure rapid coordination and the effective expression of any important divergencies of view." For our part, as I have indicated earlier, we are moving in the direction of producing synthesized reports to ease the burden of the intelligence analyst who now frequently works with fragmented information which he must laboriously draw together in order to reach an intelligence conclusion. In effect, give him the "stew", not the "beans".

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